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THE

CHARACTER AND GREATNESS

OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

A DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED APRIL 23, 1865.

BY REV. E. HINGELEY,

Pastor of the M. E. Church, Monongahela City, Pa.

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BY REV. E. HINGELEY,

Pastor of the M. E. Church, Monongahela City, Pa.

CORRESPONDENCE.

April 24, 1865.

Rev. E. Hingeley,

Dear Sir:—In the spirit of the patriotic and admirable Discourse delivered by you yesterday, on "the character of our deceased president, Abraham Lincoln," we respectfully ask a copy for publication.

Yours truly,

G. V. LAWRENCE, J. R. HAZZARD,
E. L. KING, WM. WICKERHAM,
ABRAHAM VANVOORHES, SAMUEL KING,
WILLIAM M'CLURE, JOS. ALEXANDER,
JOS. WILSON, J. T. FERNEE,
CYRUS UNDERWOOD, G. W. GROVE.
DANIEL PIERCE,

To Hon. G. V. Lawrence, Dr. E. L. King, A. Vanvoorhes, and others.

Gentlemen :—I am happy to learn that my discourse commends itself to your approval, and herewith place it at your disposal.

Yours respectfully,

April 26, 1865. E. HINGELEY.

SERMON.

Two thoughts oppress and embarass me on this occasion; the greatness of my subject, and the needlessness of my task. I cannot say anything to increase the lustre of his fame, or that will enshrine him more sacredly in your affections. "Then why attempt a eulogy on the life and character of Abraham Lincoln?" To satisfy our own grief and gratitude, and to pay a just tribute to manly, noble worth. As a motto for this address, I have chosen the anguish-riven cry of Israel when they heard the chief whose prudence, fortitude and valor had crushed their foes and saved their country, lay in his own triumph and blood:

> "All the people of Israel greatly bewailed him. They wept many days, and said, why is that great man dead who saved the people of Israel?"

The first question we propose for calm discussion is—

Is the name of Abraham Lincoln worthy of being enrolled upon the catalogue of great men? We affirm it is, and *might* argue that.

The position he occupied entitles him to this honor. You need not remind us "that merit, not position makes a man great." We know it, and reply, no man without merit could, under the circumstances, rise to that position. Let the man who denies this solve for us this problem: "*A boy raised in a floorless log cabin of the West till he was twenty-one years old, working his way to eminence in the legal profession, to honor in Congressional halls, and finally elected President of the United States; elected a second time to that position of honor, and dying at the comparative early age of fifty-six.*" Could any but a great man rise so high—great in the highest, noblest sense of that word? The tories of England, in the face of a like fact, have for years been

trying to belittle that great man, over whose grave their nation is now weeping, Richard Cobden. Now that he is dead, his most inveterate foes, viewing his humble origin, and the unfavorable circumstances of his birth and life, and the high and honorable position which he, in spite of those circumstances attained unto, pronounce him a "problem of greatness." The *Times*, viewing him in this light, says, "He was unquestionably great;" and his rancorous enemy, D'Israeli, says "he was without doubt the greatest political character that the upper middle class of this country *has yet produced*, an ornament to the House of Commons, and an honor to England." The rule is safe, legitimate, and logical; and if under it "England's working man" could attain a seat in the British Parliament, be twice offered a seat in the British Cabinet, refuse a baronetcy, win the respect of the civilized world, and when he died, at the age of sixty, his death evoke a nation's tears, we say "he was a great man," surely we may apply this rule to our beloved President, saying, he too is great, who, under *greater* disabilities could rise to *higher* honor in a *shorter* period of time. Let me express the conviction that America and England have lost two of their noblest friends and greatest statesmen in the death of Abraham Lincoln and Richard Cobden.

Our friends in Europe—and, thank God! we have many—have fallen into a gross misconception of the character of our chief ruler. The cause of it is this: they read of his humble origin, his lounging manner, his huge hands and feet, and his funny stories, and they believe the shameless slanders of home traitors who have ransacked the English language to find epithets to caricature him, "idiot, buffoon," and the like; then they have asked, "How came such a man to be elected President of the United States?" and attribute it to the *accidents* of our popular elections. Why do they not penetrate beneath that rough surface to discover the native giant strength of mind and integrity lying beneath that ruggedness of nature and of form? Does it follow that, because a ruler does not always *strut*, that he is never *dignified?* Because he is not always courtly, fastidious and elegant, he is not a gentleman? Because a man sometimes has a light heart he can never have a heavy mind? If it does, I do not know where lay Cob-

den's greatness, for the English "weaver" was as rough as the American "rail-splitter." When he went to Paris to negotiate with the Emperor the most important of European treaties, the French were as much shocked and convulsed at his thick-soled boots and seedy coat, as some of our democratic friends were when Mr. Lincoln told Lord Lyons his first "little story," and when the Emperor sent him to his hotel in his own state coach, and Cobden, recognizing in one of the liveried, powdered footmen an old village school-fellow, stretched out his hand, and cried, "Why, Tom, is that you?" "Yes, Dick, it is. I knew you, but dared not speak to you; but, since you have broke the rule, how are you, old friend?" the grandees were shocked at such vulgarity. Let me remind our aristocratic friends on the other side, that Mr. Lincoln never did such a vulgar thing as that, and if such hearty naturalness did not militate against the greatness of one, why should it against the greatness of the other. In viewing the character of Mr. Lincoln, we must look at him through this haze. If regard for the feelings of others, if kindness of heart and adaptation to the circumstances of others, constitutes a gentleman, there were few men so refined and tender, so kind and gentlemanly as he. Every one found him easy of access, and when great state occasions came which required dignity and courtliness, every one who has seen him on such occasions, has remarked his courtly dignity and unconstrained grace. Mr. Everett, one of the most refined and dignified of Americans, after observing him on such occasions, has pronounced him "the peer in deportment of any one present." We are too much accustomed to guage cotemporary merit by these external, superficial tests; let us penetrate the outward germ, and view the peer without his robes, the king without his crown.

There was no *accident* in the election of our President. He was chosen for strength of mind, not *beauty* of person. He was elected for his sterling integrity, honest worth, and absorbing love of country, not *etiquette*. Here was one evidence of this: Stephen A. Douglas was by popular instinct called "the little giant," and who so worthy of such a name as he who could cope with a Webster, a Seward, and a Sumner on Congressional floors, and always give

as much as he received. But I appeal to any candid man, if, when Judge Douglas measured strength with President Lincoln, he did not find his *equal;* to say the least, such a man, measured by such a standard, was great enough to legislate for any people, or rule any nation; so we thought, who elected him upon his merit to govern ourselves.

There is another phase of this subject. Europeans are apt to sneer at the freaks of our popular elections. With their sneer I will buttress our position. It would not be a difficult matter to prove that there is no nation whose citizens are so generally intelligent, especially upon home politics, as our own. Two reasons may be assigned for this: our admirable system of education, and the fact that every man enjoying the franchises of his country, is interested in its politics. The point is, that 1,866,452 voters thought Mr. A. Lincoln competent to guide the destinies of this great nation, in the most critical period of its history. Are they not as so many intelligent verdicts to his superior worth and wisdom? Give the franchise to educated Prussia, or Christian England; let them bring out their strongest, best men, and by large majorities elect one to the Premiership, and would not that be considered *prima facia* evidence that he is great and wise, strong and worthy? Will not the same rule apply to ourselves, and to our dear President? We are as intelligent as they, as discriminating as they, the office is as high, and as important. We have as many good and great men to select from; we know as much about them and our wants. It is, therefore, an insult to reason to deny his *qualification* for the high office he filled, and the fact that, under circumstances the most unfavorable, he rose to that high qualification and was elevated to the high position of President by the free, intelligent suffrage of an enlightened people, presumptively establishes his greatness, and you may depend upon it, that in future editions of such works as "Men who have risen," his name will stand high in that list of noble chivalry, "who being dead, yet speaketh," men, the mention of whose names rouse the ardor of the manly, quicken the pulse of the free, and stir the world's great heart to virtue, liberty and God.

But the question of his greatness must, after all, be decided by

the question, "How did he maintain himself in and discharge the duties of his honorable and exalted position?" It is quite possible for the rank to be larger than the man; not so much in republican as in other forms of government, where a man often has so much the blood of his ancestors in his veins, as not to leave room for a noble, free, generous, original impulse of his own. If A. Lincoln was not a great man, his position at the bar, on the forum, or in the Presidential chair will soon make it manifest. I affirm he was great, for

He always proved himself equal to every position in which he was placed, and every emergency that came upon him.

As a *lawyer*, we could produce the opinions of the best advocates of the nation to his ability, integrity, originality, his goodness of heart, and his success. "I never knew Lincoln to do a mean act in his life," says his most intimate friend and business partner, the veteran Lawyer Stewart, and the conscientious Close said, "God never made a finer man; pure, candid, upright, unblemished, incapable of falsehood, and without one base or sordid trait."

As a *political debater*, judge of him by his public speeches, or read the testimony of his political opponents. "He was too kind for bitterness, and too great for vituperation." Says another, and he too the great and venerable Crittenden, "I have heard all the eminent statesmen of the past and present generation, and candor compels me to say, he is the most logical and gentlemanly speaker I ever listened to."

As a *legislator*, his record is with us. Study it well, and by it judge the man. It is time for slander to have talked and written itself out of breath, and justice to be done to one of whom a great statesman said, "There was never elected to the House of Representatives, a purer, a more intelligent, and loyal representative than Abraham Lincoln." Here we must utter our dissent from the expressed opinion of one of his most ardent friends and admirers, Governor Andrew, of Massachusetts, who says, "Perhaps little that he spoke or wrote will pass into literature, yet"—in this, the next sentence, we fully agree—"few men have ever written or spoken with greater effect, or to better purpose;" and for this reason we believe that much that he wrote and spoke *will* pass

into literature. His speech at the Cooper Institute is already a classic; his first inaugural, in tender, earnest expostulation, and firm, weeping resolve that the Republic shall not be divided or overthrown, will be as immortal as "Washington's Farewell Address." His "Proclamation of Emancipation," will that ever be "out of print?" His impromptu address at Gettysburg will be in the school books of our posterity when the graceful oration of Edward Everett is forgotten. His last inaugural, when will its echoes die? Hear its closing, manly pathos: "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so, still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

We may concede whatever his opponents may in reason allege against him, yet claim with these concessions that in the clearness, robustness and sagacity of his understanding, his sincere love of truth and absorbing love of country; his undeviating purpose to do right; his confidence in, and his subordination to the guidance of Providence; his will of unusual firmness and his consistent regard and treatment of himself as the servant of the people, he had few superiors in our Congress chambers.

As a *President* let his works praise him. In the year 1860 the freemen of the United States elected, as was their privilege, Abraham Lincoln, to the Presidency of this nation, and he at once promptly and fearlessly entered upon the duties of his high office.

Be assured, my fellow citizens, it was not a chaplet of roses we then placed upon his brow, but, rather a crown of thorns; and if, as some of his most implacable foes have affirmed he became "King

Abraham the First," it was not a seat of down he occupied; it was not a sceptre of ease we placed in his hand. The embarrassments of his position, the arduous toils of his position, the dangers of his position, who can estimate them? That he was surrounded by implacable foes and infamous traitors, you know; that he was resisted by a gigantic rebellion, you know; and, how patiently he sustained himself under those embarrassments; how faithfully he performed those duties; how courageously, almost recklessly, he braved those dangers; how magnanimously merciful he deported himself towards those foes; and how triumphantly he has shorn that rebellion of its strength, dwarfed its dimensions, and *crushed*, yes, thanks be unto God! *crushed* it beneath the foot of his lawful authority, we all know.

We cannot form a truer conception of a man than by judging him by his works. "Men live in deeds, not words." If you would form a just idea of the power which lay within that great man's throbbing, yet seemingly quiet heart; if you would form a just idea of the latent wisdom which lay beneath that genial face, if it was a little homely, you have only to compare—no contrast—the *then* and *now* of this wicked rebellion. *Then*, Washington itself was not only environed by treason, but traitors swarmed throughout the army, in the navy, and the Senate Chamber, they lurked in every office of the city and country. *Now*, the dear old flag waves over rebellion's capital; *now* the Commander-in-Chief of the rebel forces is our prisoner upon parole, and the President of the Confederacy, vagabond-like, is "fleeing when no one is pursuing," and the faithful hand of old gallant Anderson has just reared the same flag over the dismantled walls of Sumter, which four years ago was insulted, dishonored, and infamously displaced by the accursed Palmetto rag of South Carolina. I wonder what Governor Pickins thinks of our deceased President? I do not care much what he thinks, but I am sure that even he must say our President is a great man; for, if you remember, he defied the United States and all the combined powers of the world to displace that accursed Palmetto flag. I say, contrast the *then* of this mighty rebellion when *he*, over whom we weep, and the nation weeps, and the whole civilized world will weep when it hears of his

death, took the reins of government, with the dwarfed, crushed, dishonored, accursed, writhing rebellion, now he has laid *them* down, and tell me if we can over estimate the worth of the Pilot, who has stood unflinchingly at the helm throughout this terrible storm, and guided our grand, noble ship safe to her old moorings?

We were rejoicing over these triumphs, thanking God, shaking hands with each other in happy congratulation that we had chosen him to finish the work so bravely begun, so heroically continued, and so triumphantly brought to secession's "last ditch." And if we were happy, how much more might his heart expand and thrill with joy, who had borne the burden, the crushing burden, of a great nation upon his heart, and mind, and hands? Victory, peace, could bring to no other heart such joy, such rest, such honor, such gratitude. I do not wonder that his nature, always genial, should seek amusement, and his mind and energies, so long taxed and strung to their severest tension, should seek relaxation. Remember, he had just come from Richmond, and for the first time mingled with the dear associates of home and jubilant home friends, and being pressingly invited to the theatre, and his presence being announced, he went, saying as he started, "I would not go, but the people would be disappointed, General Grant and myself being announced to be there." Scarcely had he taken his seat, when a villain, a miscreant, a wretch, yea, summing up all odium in one name, *a Northern Secessionist*, pierced his noble brain, exclaiming, in sentiment the most foreign and unnatural "*Sic semper tyrannis.*" O, Heaven! where were thy thunderbolts? Angels of God! were ye encamped, or how restrained? Now, he's dead! No, the good never die. Yet, he is dead to us! no, he lives enshrined in our heart of hearts! However saddening and unwelcome the thought may be, our noble President, Abraham Lincoln, is dead! and to-day, at this hour, may we not say as Israel of old said, as they greatly bewailed him, "Why is that great man dead who *saved his people?*" Ah! friends, there is the culminating proof of his greatness—"*He saved the people.*" *Saved us* when the verdict of the civilized world was so hastily and so ungenerously given against us that we were lost! *Saved us* when thousands of Northern citizens pronounced against him, his party, and his

policy, ceaselessly crying, "the South *never* can be conquered!" *Saved us*, after his weak predecessor had well nigh ruined us by the infamous doctrine that "there was no power in the constitution to coerce a sovereign state." *Saved us* when state after state seceded, seizing our forts, navy yards, arsenals, mints and custom-houses; robbing, dishonoring, and hurling defiance at our teeth. *Saved us* by re-capturing every fort, conquering and bringing back every state, until our starry flag gleams in brightness over every one, and the Union, free empress of States, unagitated by the passions, unmoved by the dissensions of any one of them, watches again the rights and fame of all, once more reposes among the mountain summits of her power, holding in one hand the fair olive branch of peace, and in the other the thunderbolt and meteor flag of war. Is he not a great man who hath done this? Yes. Let Northern traitors blend their voices with Southern rebels to defame him. Let those "vipers bite the file;" he has realized the prophetic vision of brave old John Crittenden when he said, "There is a niche in the temple of fame, near to Washington, which shall be occupied by the statue of him who shall save his country. Mr. Lincoln has a mighty destiny. It is for him to be but a President of the people of the United States, and there will his statue be." There it is! He has won it; and the time will come when no heart will be found ingenious enough to refuse it, nor tongue depraved enough to deny it.

But he is dead; assassinated; murdered! Yonder he lies, a great man stretched upon his own trophies, in his own blood. It is not for me to uncover that body, blood stained and ghastly, to expose to your eyes the mournful reason why your country, humanity, and religion are in tears to-day. With mingled sobs and tears we admire the past, regret the present, and tremble for the future. *Why* is that great man dead? After so many great deeds, was there nothing further for him to do? Ripe for his reward, had the time come for him to receive the crown reserved for those who have finished a glorious career? Placed we too much confidence in him; loved we him too dearly? Answer not these questions. But another I will ask, and I ask it, too, in the shrieking, agonising cry of his beloved wife:

"Why did he kill him?" or, in the language of his favorite, stricken son, Thaddeus, to the veteran Sumner, "O, sir! can you tell me what my dear father ever done to that man, that he shot him dead?" A bleeding nation, an astonished world, a weeping church, stricken humanity, unites with thee, thou grief stricken boy, in that simple, suffering question. What? Was it to gratify private revenge for personal injuries received? No; Mr. Lincoln was too kind and tender-hearted to injure any one. "He never had a *personal* enemy." Was it for the advancement of religious or political freedom? Was it—Was it prompted by the accursed lust of power, or greed of gold? Was it to advance the interests of the Confederacy, or secure easy terms for the reception of traitors? O, terrible mistake! If this was it, what a terrible awakening there will be to this cruel and bloody dream! A shot on fort Sumter four years past united us, and on the fourth anniversary of the day that flag was taken down, a shot from a Northern rebel sympathizer has united us in a more terrible earnestness that rebellion shall be crushed, and slavery, the cause of rebellion, must die. It is the moral defeat of treason.

Let me express the opinion that the motive to this act was to secure an immortal notoriety to John Wilkes Booth, and well hast thou succeeded, infamous man! Henceforth thy name is accursed! Here is the problem as we alone can resolve it: a man without a *moral* nature coveted eternal *infamy*, and to secure it, murdered the *greatest* man of the nation *and the best ruler of the age.* Had I no other name by which to call thee, thou wretch! "henceforth I would call thee devil!"

Another thing, he has secured an immortality of glory and renown to his victim; the dramatic unity of whose life was then complete, full, climatic, and needed only this apotheosis to consecrate him to immortality, and that at this very moment of time it was accomplished, adding, in the moment of his triumph, *martyrdom* to his other claims upon our veneration, gratitude, and love. Then, what an analogy of glory there is in the manner of his death. Thousands of our good, noble soldiers have died by the bullets of the enemy for whom his generous heart has wept and could have bled. In life he was joined to them in the spirit of un-

flinching patriotism which inspired him, and "in death they are not divided." By a common inference they have gone to the grave, but his fame shall last "long as the sun and moon endureth." Future generations will wonder why he was so little appreciated in this, even by his most ardent friends, and the bitterness of his enemies shall be their pain and astonishment. Long after his ashes have mingled with the soil of his own great State, statesmen, heroes, poets, the virtue, wisdom, patriotism, and wealth of the land shall visit his grave to shed affection's tears over the second saviour of his country. Yes, and as Virginia has desecrated Mount Vernon, and proved herself unworthy of its relics, let the dust of Washington be urned and taken and laid by the side of our President, the brave, prudent, tender-hearted, magnanimous Lincoln, with this epitaph: *Washington* the procurer, and *Lincoln* the martyr of freedom. And, if ought else is needed, let it be *Lincoln*, the man of lofty purpose, single eye, and loving heart; he of a giant's strength, a hero's courage, a child's simplicity, a woman's tenderness, and apostle's love, a martyr's will!

Let us plant the cypress over the *nation's* grave—though, thanks be unto God, it is not the *grave* of the nation. Next to God, our thanks are due to his honored instrument, Abraham Lincoln. But it is, and ever shall be the nation's grave, and we will moisten it with our tears, and with dimmed eyes we will look upward, thanking God that we have such a President to venerate and weep for. Let us also try and learn the lessons of his life, and emulate the virtues of his character. Fortitude in adversity. Moderation in triumph. Mercy in victory. Oh! thou God of all consolation, though we may never hear again those mild and judicious accents, "Let us be very sober;" though we may never hear the benignant cry of him, who, on the anniversary of thy Son's death, was so cruelly slain, "Let justice be tempered with mercy;" may we hear the old pathetic cry of Him hung for us upon the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

"A martyr to the cause of man,
His blood is freedom's eucharist,
And in the world's great hero list,
His name shall lead the van.

And raised on Faith's white wings unfurl'd
To heaven's pure light; of him we say,
He fell upon the selfsame day
A greater died to save the world."

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